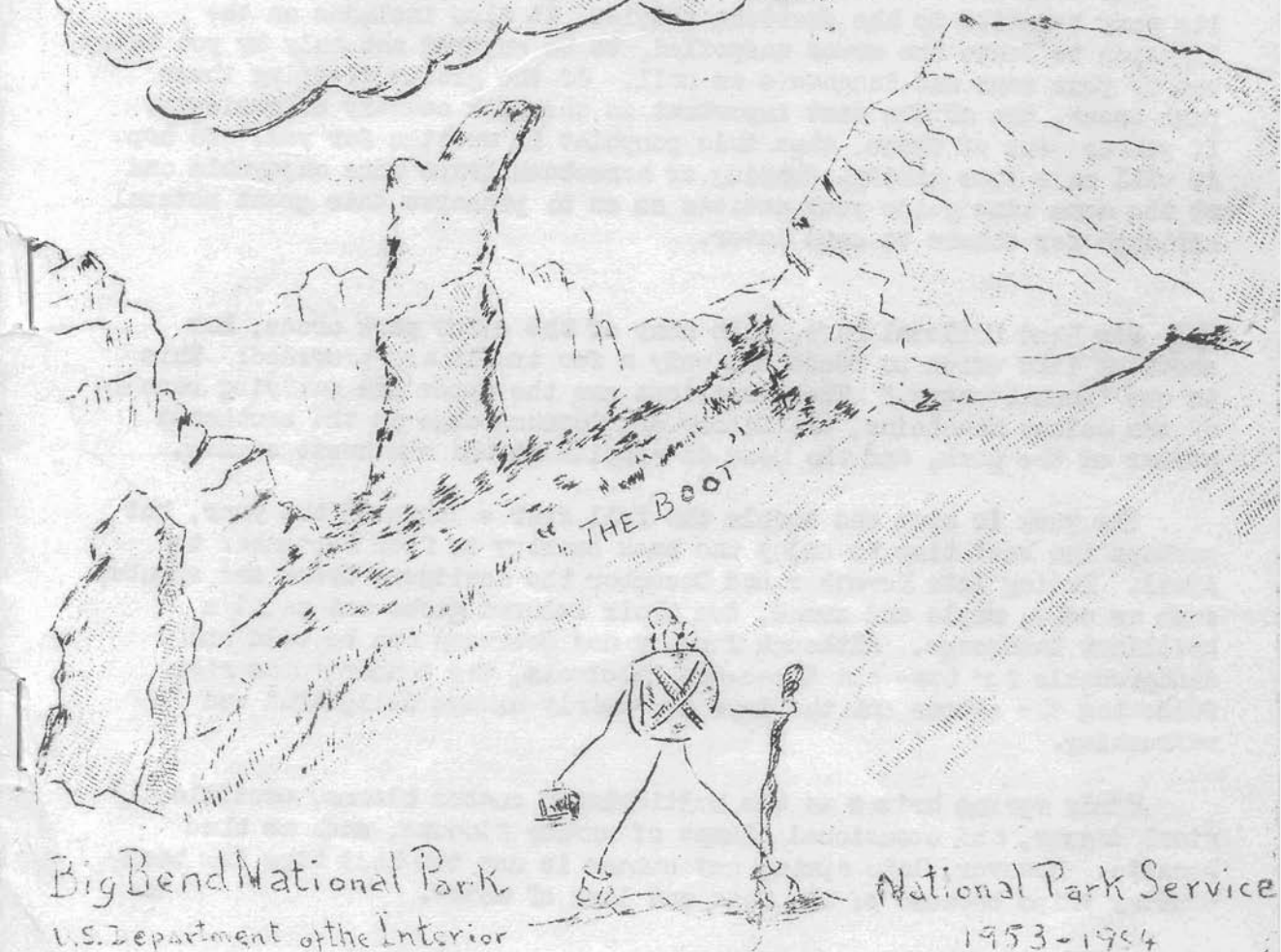


Recreational Activities Box  
Back Packing File



# The Back Country



Big Bend National Park  
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service  
1953-1984

## BACK COUNTRY

"Let us cherish the domain we have received from the hands of nature, and in using it for our collective enjoyment manage it wisely and damage it as little as possible. Let us study the pages of its story. Let us sense its romance. And, finally, let us receive its benediction."

Harlean James, "Romance of the National Parks."

The National Park idea includes inspiration and recreation among its many benefits to the American people. It also includes an obligation to leave the areas unspoiled, to be enjoyed not only by you today, but by your sons and daughters as well. Of the groups visiting these park areas, one of the most important is the back country enthusiasts. If you are one of these, then this pamphlet is written for you. We hope it will make your hiking, camping or horseback trips more enjoyable and at the same time guide your actions so as to preserve this great natural heritage for others to come later.

Big Bend National Park, like many of the other park areas, has sections into which no roads and only a few trails are provided: This is our "Back Country." These sections are the upper and outlying reaches of the Chisos Mountains, the Sierra del Carmen range in the southeast corner of the park, and the Mesa de Anguila in the southwest corner.

The park is open and usable the full four seasons of the year, but perhaps the best time to enjoy the back country is from September to April. During late November and December the deciduous trees and shrubs, such as oaks, maple and sumac, don their colored garbs and paint a brilliant landscape. Although January and February can be cold and disagreeable for two- and three-day intervals, the temperatures rise following the storms and the days are nearly always delightful and refreshing.

Early spring brings us the multicolored cactus blooms, ocotillo, giant dagger, and occasional clumps of spring flowers, such as blue bonnets. However, late spring and summer is not the best time for back country trips because of the heat and lack of water.

While traveling through the back country you will have an excellent opportunity to study the geology, the plants and the wildlife of the area. You will find many places that few white men have seen but all steeped in legends of lost mines, Indian and renegade hideouts, smuggler trails and cattle rustlers.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR TRIP

Perhaps you are starting out on your first trip into the back country. If so we assume that you who take the time and effort to leave the roads behind and strike out for the back country will welcome these suggestions on how to care for yourselves.

For those of you who can carry your requirements in a back pack and like to be fancy free, a pack animal is not required. Others will find that by having a burro to carry the load, their hiking will be freer and more enjoyable.

### PRECAUTIONS TO AID YOUR ENJOYMENT

Study a map at Park Headquarters or one of the ranger stations. Talk over your trip with a ranger and let him help you plan overnight stops, learn the location of springs and water holes, and identify what to see and do. He can issue you a campfire permit. Take the best map you can secure.

Let the ranger know where you expect to go and when you plan to return.

Take plenty of water with you.

Take a companion with you.

Take your time and do not rush through the country, but go leisurely to see and contemplate the wonders of nature in this colorful semi-desert region.



GOOD CONDUCT  
in the  
BACK COUNTRY

Our Back Country is your Back Country to enjoy and to leave its majesty and beauty to inspire others who will follow you. Below are listed a few "Rules of Conduct" to remind all of us of simple things we can do to take care of our wilderness.

Camping. Enjoy your camping by choosing a safe place. Please do not build fires near or under trees and shrubs and put your fire dead out before leaving camp. A permit must be obtained before building campfires except in designated campgrounds.

There are no garbage cans in the Back Country, so leave a clean campsite by burning or burying the garbage and trash.

Like garbage cans, you will find no toilets -- so imitate the cat and get away from camp, dig a hole; refill it with dirt.

Fire. Think before you discard matches or cigarettes; and smoke only when stopping in a safe place. Surprisingly, a raging fire can start in grass, lechuguilla and sotol. Also, our small forested area is very precious and we must protect it from fire.

Firearms. Hunting or the carrying of firearms is not permissible.

Dogs and Cats... are not permitted on trails or in Back Country. Plant, rock or insect collection permits are not issued for personal collections. They may be authorized in advance through the superintendent for the taking of specimens only for recognized colleges and museums. All archaeological material will be of value for future studies only if left in place for trained scientists to interpret in relation to its site. Do not disturb any Indian caves. Please report them to park officials.

Hikers on trails shall remain quiet when saddle or pack animals are passing (Try to get off the trail completely). Do not attempt to hide. Pack outfits or saddle stock have the right-of-way at all times.

Accidents. It is your responsibility after caring for injuries to report serious accidents to the superintendent's office or one of the ranger stations. We will help you all we can, but we must know of such incidents.

If you think you are lost, take it easy. Keep your head and be assured that someone soon will be looking for you. Sit down and try to figure out where you are. Use your head and not your legs. After a while your memory will straighten out some of the landscape for you and you can remember how you got there. Get in the shade during the heat of the day. The grip of panic can be the grip of death, but you have nothing to fear from the animals, mountains or hunger and you should have water with you. At night, in fog,

storm or darkness, stop at once and make camp in a sheltered place. Gather plenty of dry fuel. Build a fire in a safe place (Be sure to put it out when you leave). Three shouts, three smokes, three fires, or three of almost anything repeated at intervals is a signal of distress and will bring help.

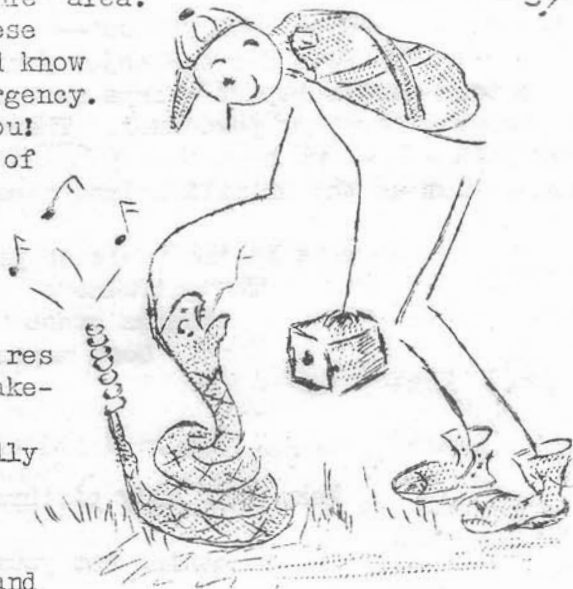
Snakes. Big Bend is like any other section of our great West and Southwest in that there are rattlesnakes. Though only one person was reported bitten within the park since its inception in 1944, a few cases have been reported adjacent to and outside the area.

No fatalities have occurred in these cases, but we feel everyone should know what to do in case of such an emergency.

Carry a snake bite kit with you!

The first thing to do in case of snakebite is to sit or lie down and be quiet. If the bite is on the leg or arm use a tourniquet to stop the flow of blood from the wound toward the heart. Make a small incision across the punctures and suck the blood by mouth if snakebite kit and suction cup are not available. Even if you accidentally swallow a little poison it will not affect you. Release tourniquet every 10 to 20 minutes to allow some blood to circulate and to help remove the poison by allowing it to flow out of the wound. Remain quiet until help can arrive. If necessary to move before help arrives, do so slowly and in stages.

Don't pat our rattlesnakes!



### Animals

Wild animals are often unpredictable in what they may do, and for that reason should not be approached. It is a safe rule that animals will leave you alone if you leave them alone. This wilderness is the animals' home -- be courteous, as the intruder in their land.

### Climbing

The peaks and mountains of the area are unsafe for climbing, due to the formational faults and fractures. Therefore in your traveling over them be very careful on loose rocks, slides and slick rock. Do not dislodge or roll rock from high places.



HINT TO HIKERS!

DON'T WEAR NEW SHOES!

GOOD LUCK TO YOU --

Have fun and enjoy yourself to the utmost and on your return please report things seen on your trip to the nearest ranger or other park personnel. There will be others following your path - - - we hope that your undamaged and clean trail will please them as the primitive land pleases you today.

This is the basis of proper use -

Thoughtfulness

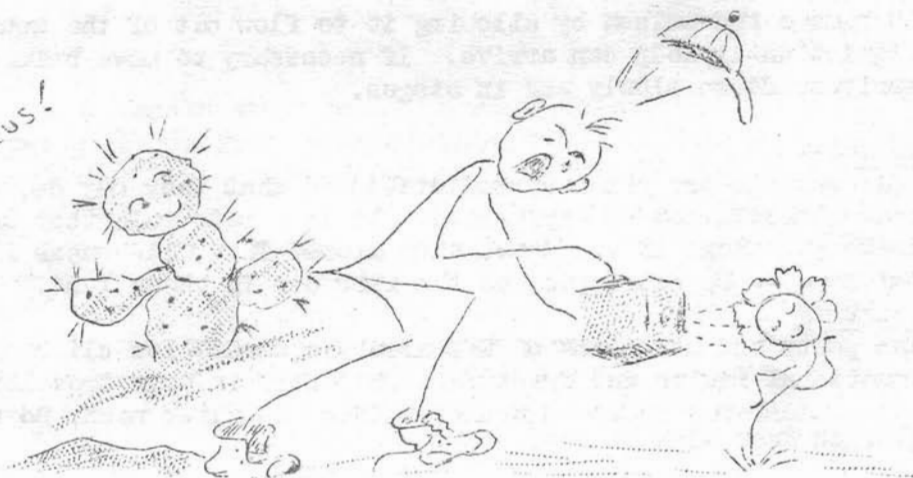
Common sense

Good manners.

Take away only pictures and memories;

Leave nothing but your footprints!

Man  
Meets  
Cactus!





## TIPS FOR CAMERA-TOTERS

By Peter Koch

When you explore the "Back Country" of the Big Bend, tote your camera. Carry it to the top of mile-high mountains, to the brilliant painted desert, - or to awesome sheer-wall canyons.

This is a land of strange contrasts and vast spaces, and the variety of scenic effects will produce picture trophies of unique character. Shoot Green Gulch by the light of a rising sun through morning mists. Grab a sunset shot through the Window, photograph Casa Grande, the South Rim country, and the phantom or Chisos Mountains in morning moods -- or view the drama, any evening, of the Rio Grande cutting its canyons to the base of Mexico's magnificent Sierra del Carmen. Let your enthusiasm carry you over the rough places. Have camera fun! -- "shoot" your friends in the "Back Country" of the Big Bend. They, and you too, can have no better break than to become a part of this unspoiled wilderness for a little while.

So, tote your camera - box, or mechanical masterpiece - to the "Back Country". Collect your picture trophies against the day when your aged and creaking bones will carry you no more to such remote places!

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BEWARE of these two enemies of all cameras and good pictures:

DUST - Texans might brag that this Big Bend dust is the world's finest -- and it is -- but keep it out of your camera!

HEAT - Your campfire spot and the glove compartment of your car are poor places in which to keep your camera.

Remember this DON'T:

DON'T you be careless on the trail or with your camera.

Take your time -- let your pictures tell where, when and what you saw and who was there.

DO THESE:

Have your camera ready for instant use.

Take another shot -- the surest way of getting your pictures trophy is to shoot it -- and shoot it again!

LIGHT

With normal sunlight your standard exposure for color film transparencies is 1/50 at F.8. If in doubt, get the important picture by exposing one faster and one slower than your best guess.

The camera-toter who carries a box camera has no worries if slow film is used. On desert or mountain top close down an extra stop on other cameras. Sure do thank you, stranger, come back again!

